Healthy Forests Report

July 10, 2006

The Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service implement the National Fire Plan (NFP) and Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) in order to help save the lives of firefighters and citizens and to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire to our communities, forests, and rangelands.

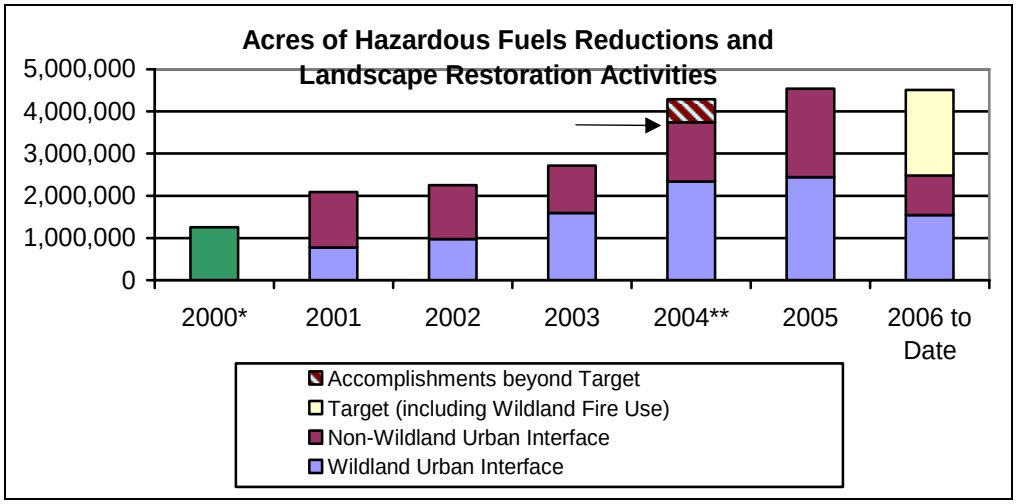
HAZARDOUS FUELS REDUCTION & LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PROJECTS

An excessive accumulation of hazardous or unusually flammable fuels in our forests, woodlands, and grasslands is the root cause of the unprecedented fire risk facing our public lands. Land managers remove hazardous fuels via programs funded specifically for that purpose and in other programs whose principle goal is the achievement of a variety of resource management objectives that can be broadly labeled landscape restoration. Treatments occur both inside and outside the wildland urban interface (WUI).

1. Inside the WUI treatments reduce fuels around homes, communities, and resources to slow or stop wildland fires from threatening these high-value areas.

2. Beyond the WUI, treatments not only help protect communities by creating conditions that enable firefighters to more successfully suppress fires before they enter the WUI but also reduce fire severity and its impact on valued landscapes and natural resources.

Under Healthy Forests Initiative and the National Fire Plan, the Federal land management agencies have treated over 15 million acres of federal lands since 2000. These treatments have contributed to the reduced threat of catastrophic wildland fire.



* FY 2000 is used as a baseline for reporting, as the NFP was implemented in FY 2001. Treatment location was not included in reporting prior to FY 2001.

** Acres treated under landscape restoration activities were not reported prior to FY 2004.

Table 1: Hazardous Fuels & Landscape Restoration Activities, FY 2006 *(as of 7/14/06)*

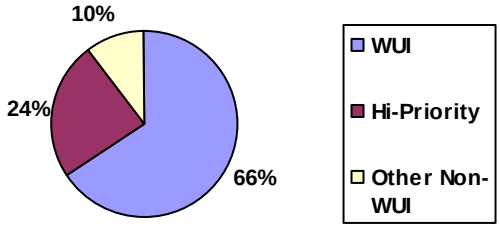
	Hazardous Fuels Appropriations		Landscape Restoration Appropriations		
Treatment Type	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**Prescribed Fire**	**Mechanical & Other**	**TOTAL**
Forest Service	968,685	246,663	116,860	252,111	1,584,319
DOI	510,563	271,898	19,030	29,569	831,060
TOTAL	1,479,248	518,561	135,890	281,680	2,415,379

Note: Total does not include acres treated by Wildland Fire Use on Forest Service Lands or acres treated with State Fire Assistance funding.

Hazardous Fuels and Landscape Restoration Priorities

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior design hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities to meet one of three objectives:

1. Directly reduce wildfire threats within the wildland urban interface.
2. Treat areas outside of the wildland-urban interface (non-WUI) that are at greatest risk of catastrophic wildland fire. These *high priority non-WUI treatments* reduce the risk of unwanted fire to natural resources, achieve other natural resource management objectives, and, in some cases also serve to protect WUI areas.



3. Maintain desired landscape conditions achieved through previous treatments outside the WUI in order to retain the associated benefits.

HEALTHY FORESTS AUTHORITIES

Implementation of activities under the HFI and HFRA authorities can be summarized as a three-step process:

1. NEPA Planning and Decisions – Activities that will require NEPA Decisions are identified (this generally occurs up to 3 years prior to actual project implementation). The planning is typically broad in scope, and may include multiple treatments.
2. Analysis and Preparation – Project preparation and design generally occur in the year prior to implementation. Project scope, location and treatment type are refined.
3. Treatment Planning and Accomplishment – Final planning and implementation occur.

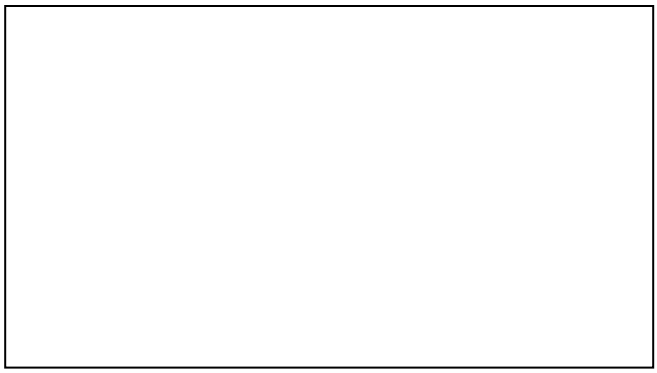
Table 2: Healthy Forests Activities, FY 2006

Treatments Planned	Treatments Completed	Acres Planned	HFI/HFRA Acres Completed
2,539	1,258	516,556	252,276

UTILIZATION OF FOREST BYPRODUCTS

Byproducts removed during hazardous fuels reduction and landscape restoration activities are often utilized in certain forest products (e.g., timber, engineered lumber, paper and pulp, furniture) and bio-energy and bio-based products (e.g., plastics, ethanol, and diesel). To date, the Forest Service and DOI have treated 534,463 acres mechanically; of these, 41% have included biomass utilization.

Biomass Utilization from All Mechanically Treated Acres



STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTS & AGREEMENTS AWARDED

Stewardship contracting includes natural resource management activities that improve land conditions. These projects shift the focus of federal forest and rangeland management towards a desired future resource condition. They are also a means for federal agencies to contribute to the development of sustainable rural communities, maintain healthy forest ecosystems, and provide a continuing source of local income and employment.

Table 3: Stewardship Contracts & Agreements

	Bureau of Land Management		**Forest Service**	
2003	2 contracts	300 acres	50 contracts	14,000 acres
2004	22 contracts	15,000 acres	64 contracts	42,000 acres
2005	58 contracts awarded	15,000 acres	45 contracts	35,500 acres
2006	15 contracts awarded	6,043 acres	39 contracts	31,000 acres
Total	**295 contracts / agreements for 158,843 acres***			

*Not all projects in table above were authorized under HFRA.

HFRA TITLE IV: APPLIED RESEARCH

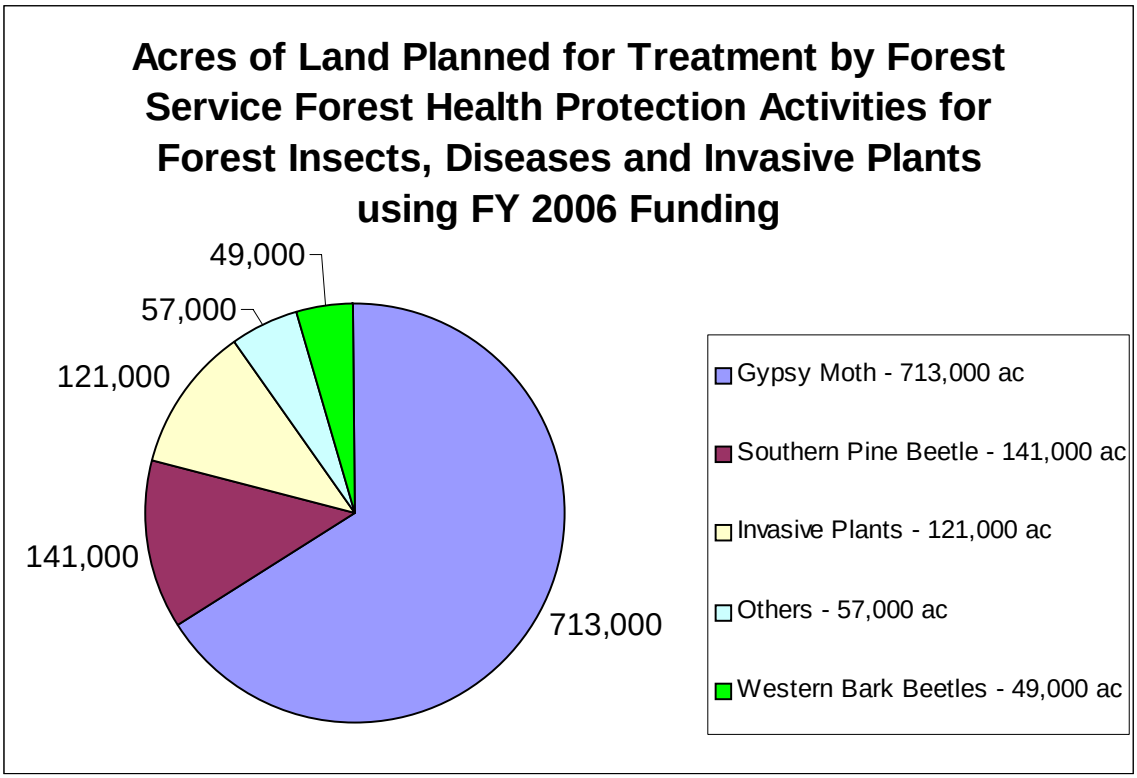
The Forest Service's applied research projects, in partnership with several universities and state forestry agencies, aim to conduct and evaluate different land management practices that reduce problems associated with the current outbreaks of insects and diseases and to translate that information for practicing professionals, landowners, and the public.

There are currently 6 Silvicultural Assessment and 6 Accelerated Information Gathering projects planned or underway. For more information of the Forest Service's Applied Research Projects under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, please visit:

http://www.healthyforests.gov/applied_research/index.html

INVASIVE SPECIES AND FOREST HEALTH

In FY 2006, Forest Service Forest Health Protection activities include both prevention and suppression efforts and provided resources to restore lands impacted by native and nonnative forest pests on federal, state and private lands. Some of the nonnative pests addressed included: hemlock woolly adelgid, white pine blister rust, gypsy moth, sudden oak death, emerald ash borer, Asian long horned beetle, European wood wasp, cycad scale, wiliwili gall wasp and invasive plants. Over one million acres are planned to be treated as a result of Forest Health Protection efforts funded in FY 2006.



Though various nonnative species are being treated, the only data currently available regarding accomplishment are for gypsy moth where over 137,033 acres have been treated.

All projects planned for southern pine beetle and most for western bark beetles improve condition class. Nearly 141,000 acres for southern pine beetle and 33,000 acres for western bark beetles are proposed for thinning, planting, sanitation or site preparation treatments on state, private, and federal lands. These treatments improve condition class. To date, over 123,229 acres have been reported accomplished for southern pine beetle and 4,658 acres for western bark beetles.

FOREST SERVICE USE OF THE ESA COUNTERPART REGULATIONS

Since the training module on procedures, the Section 7 consultation standards of review, and monitoring was prepared in May, 2004, over 250 Forest Service line officers, and over 500 biologists have both taken the training and been certified to use the regulations. Through February, 2005, over 50 NFP projects had used the process, and the amount of use since then will be known in March, 2006. The one-year evaluation of counterpart regulation use is ongoing, and results of that will be used to make any needed improvements in the use of this important tool.

HEALTHY FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES

Community Wildfire Protection Planning in Nevada Fuels School Program

The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) developed for White Pine County, Nevada included many recommendations to improve community protection from wildfire, including a fuels reduction component. Utilizing State Fire Assistant grant monies, Nevada Division of Forestry (NDF) took the lead with support and cooperation from the BLM, USFS, State of Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT), White Pine County, the City of Ely and a private landowner.

NDOT hauled all the chips to the David E Norman Elementary School to be utilized as fuel for the biomass boiler. The USFS and NDF assisted in installing the boiler through the Fuels for Schools program. The three million BTU per hour steam heat plant provides heat for the original school building and two building additions. The plant uses approximately 150 tons of biomass per year. In addition to the biomass contributed by the BLM, the USFS and the NDF, the White Pine County School District has signed a free use agreement with the BLM for the 1,000 tons of biomass currently piled at Mt. Wilson. This will provide the fuel supply for the plant for approximately 6.6 years.

The project was funded by a combination of grants including $340,000 from the Fuels For Schools program, and a $250,000 earmark from U.S. Senator Harry Reid via the Department of Energy.

Please see the complete story with photos at
http://www.wflccenter.org/success_stories/84.php, and
http://www.nevadarenewables.org/?section=biomass&subsection=projects&id=123

Forest Service Biomass and Bioenergy Utilization Strategy to be Developed

The Forest Service has nominated a team from across the agency to develop a national Biomass and Bioenergy Utilization Strategy. In preparation for this effort, the team will be visiting the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest and the San Bernardino National Forest in July, to assess successes in biomass utilization as well as what barriers exist.

The Team will be meeting in August to develop a draft strategy, which will then be shared with Forest Service partners to obtain input prior to finalization. The strategy is being developed to assist the Forest Service in maintaining healthy forests and in reducing the risk of wildfire around communities.